

Message Text

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SUBJECT: CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION: CRAIG'S FINEST HOUR

REF: BELFAST 101

1. FIRST DAY OF FINAL SESSION RECONVENED NORTHERN IRELAND CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION HELD MARCH 2. MEETING TODAY AT WHICH DELEGATES WILL VOTE ON INDIVIDUAL UNITED ULSTER UNIONIST COALITION (UUUC) PROPOSALS AND VANGUARD PARTY AMENDMENTS TO SOME OF THESE PROPOSALS EXPECTED TO BE THE LAST. IT CONSENSUS UUUC PROPOSALS WILL RECEIVE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY VOTE IN CONVENTION, THAT HMG WILL BE UNABLE ACCEPT PROPOSALS AS FRAMEWORK FUTURE GOVERNMENT AND THAT SECRETARY OF STATE REES IN PARLIAMENT WILL RECOMMEND PROLONGATION OF DIRECT RULE.

2. UUUC AND OFFICIAL UNIONIST LEADER HARRY WEST MADE PRESENTATION OF PROPOSALS OF MAJORITY. HE REITERATED FAMILIAR ARGUMENTS THAT PROPOSALS REPRESENTED WILL OF MAJORITY BY BRITISH AND ANY OTHER DEMOCRATIC STANDARDS, UNCLASSIFIED

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THAT PROPOSED COMMITTEE SYSTEM MOST GENEROUS METHOD

OF ASSURING MINORITY PARTIES A SAY IN GOVERNMENT YET DEVISED AND THAT SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY (SDLP) HAD PRESENTED NO ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS FOR CONVENTION TO CONSIDER. WEST CONFIDENT THAT MAJORITY REPORT HAD RECEIVED "WIDESPREAD ACCEPTANCE." HE SPECULATED THAT IT MIGHT TAKE SOME TIME FOR PARLIAMENT TO IMPLEMENT THE REPORT WITH LEGISLATION AND PROPOSED THAT THE CONVENTION REMAIN IN BEING FOR THE INTERIM AS A CONSULTATIVE BODY. HE REPEATED CHALLENGE FOR MINORITY PARTIES WHO FAVORED POWER-SHARING TO FORM COALITION AND CONTEST ELECTION.

3. JOHN HUME SPEAKING FOR THE SDLP REJECTED THE MAJORITY REPORT IN ITS TOTALITY SAYING THAT THE CONVENTION HAD BEEN A CHARADE, THAT THE UUUC HAD NEVER RECOGNIZED THE EXISTENCE OF A FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THEREFORE HAD MADE NO EFFORT TO SOLVE IT AND THAT LEADING ELEMENTS IN THE UUUC (PAISLEY, POWELL, AND THE OTHER WESTMINSTER MPS) NEVER WANTED DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND. HE PAID TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM CRAIG AS "HONORABLE" IN ATTEMPTING SOLVE PROBLEM BUT SAID, WHILE SDLP INTERESTED IN PROPOSAL FOR REFERENDUM VOLUNTARY COALITION AND IT MERITED FURTHER STUDY, SDLP WOULD ABSTAIN IN VOTE ON THE PROPOSAL. HUME EXPLAINED THIS BY STATING SDLP UNSURE OF RESULTS OF REFERENDUM AND THAT IT WOULD BE BLOODY EXERCISE IN WHICH PEOPLE WOULD BE KILLED TO INFLUENCE VOTING. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, TO MAKE REFERENDUM WORTHWHILE, SDLP WOULD HAVE TO BELIEVE MAJORITY OF BOTH COMMUNITIES WOULD SUPPORT VOLUNTARY COALITION, NOT JUST SIMPLE MAJORITY OF ELECTORATE. IN CONTEXT OF THOSE OPPOSED TO DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT AND MISLEADING UNKNOWING CONVENTION MEMBERS, HUME MADE BITTER PERSONAL ATTACK ON REVEREND IAN PAISLEY AS "RECOGNIZED" LEADER OF UUUC, AS DEMAGOGUE AND AS "BEST FRIEND OF IRA" IN MUTUALLY REINFORCING EXTREMISM.

4. WILLIAM CRAIG MADE ELOQUENT MODERATE, BALANCED PLEA FOR REFERENDUM ON VOLUNTARY COALITION AS LAST CHANCE FOR CONVENTION MEMBERS SERVE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND. HE POINTED TO VOLUNTARY COALITION AS ONLY LINE OF

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THOUGHT PUT FORWARD THAT COULD RECONCILE TWO FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT POSITIONS. HE REFERRED TO SECURITY AND ECONOMIC SITUATIONS AND WARNED THAT DEVOLUTION WOULD BE LONG DELAYED IF CONVENTION FAILED. HE SAID PROVISIONAL IRA WOULD BE REAL WINNER IN THAT SITUATION SINCE IRA HAD ALWAYS WANTED CONVENTION TO FAIL. CRAIG'S PROPOSAL WILL PROBABLY RECEIVE ABOUT 20 VOTES OUT OF 78.

5. MARCH 2 SESSION MARKED BY MOMENTS OF BITTERNESS, RANCOROUS HUMOR AND EVEN VERBAL CRUELTY. PREVAILING ATMOSPHERE ON FLOOR, IN MEMBERS LOUNGES AND PUBLIC GALLERIES WAS SUBDUED HOWEVER. DESPITE THE BRAVE SHOW, THE UUUC IS AWARE THAT THEIR PROPOSALS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AT WESTMINSTER AND THAT THE POLITICAL DECISIONS (FOR THE NEAR FUTURE AT LEAST) WILL CONTINUE TO BE MADE BY OTHERS. THE ATTITUDE OF THE MINORITY PARTIES AND SOME MODERATE UNIONISTS IS ONE OF RESIGNATION. ONE SUCH UNIONIST REMARKED TO REPORTING OFFICER THAT PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND WOULD PROBABLY NOW RPT NOW FAVOR A VOLUNTARY COALITION IN A REFERENDUM. HE SAID THIS WOULD NOT MEAN MUCH HOWEVER SINCE THE MOOD OF THE PEOPLE OF NORTHERN IRELAND WAS SUCH THAT THEY WOULD ACCEPT ANYTHING THAT WAS PUT BEFORE THEM.

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